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AIDAC

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NSC FOR PMARCHAM, MMAGAN, BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON  
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SUBJECT: US SPECIAL ENVOY MEETING WITH THE NGO STEERING COMMITTEE

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SUMMARY  
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11. (SBU) On August 13, SE Williamson met with the NGO Steering Committee to discuss the Committee's concerns regarding humanitarian aid programs throughout Sudan, particularly in Abyei and Darfur, as well as recent issues including the referral to the ICC for an arrest warrant against President Bashir, GOS bureaucratic impediments, the upswing in attacks on humanitarian workers, and the UN's recently-increased security phases. During the hour-long session, representatives from MedAir, World Vision, CARE, IRC, Concern, Tearfund, and Mercy Corps offered the SE their observations on operational difficulties, security incidents, and their overall experiences. He also solicited their thoughts on future contingency plans and maintenance of life-saving programs.

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HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS AND CAVEATS  
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12. (SBU) Members of the NGO Steering Committee covered specific concerns and issues impacting humanitarian partners operating in Sudan, including humanitarian access and space, bureaucratic impediments and government harassment, increased pressure fueled by the ICC announcement, and NGOs' preference to "de-link" humanitarian assistance from all political negotiations with government actors.

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ABYEI: MODEST PROGRESS AND MUCH WORK AHEAD  
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13. (U) The SE recapped his trip to Abyei noting some optimism over progress made thus far, but also highlighting the limited progress made with cleaning up the town, appointing a new Administration, deploying the JIUs, and witnessing some returnees to Abyei. The SE

expressed his disappointment with incomplete training of the JIU and noted that moving to the integrated unit will be a test of success. Overall, the SE suggested that recovery would be a long process, and that great strides must be taken to repair the roads and structures destroyed by the May violence and looting.

14. (SBU) The Steering Committee was encouraged by the appointment of the Abyei Administration, however, they indicated a concern regarding the capacity of the appointed individuals, as well as the role that Edward Lino may play. According to the NGOs, Abyei needs a strong and committed administration in order to achieve real peace and security. In addition, NGO representatives stated that they are concerned about creating a "pull factor" by providing assistance in Abyei for returnees. Rather than responding to political pressure, the Committee confirmed that as people start to move back, assistance will follow, as long as the potential for violence is diminished.

15. (SBU) The Steering Committee also stated concern regarding the role of UNMIS during the May violence. Although UNMIS conducted a successful evacuation of humanitarian staff, communications broke down, and UNMIS forces neglected to stop or document the subsequent looting throughout Abyei. The SE also indicated his displeasure over reports that UNMIS only had between 70 and 90 armed soldiers in Abyei, rather than the 300 troops originally reported. According to one person on the ground, the UNMIS issue "isn't a question of bravery, but rather one of preparedness," and the SE has pushed the issue of greater preparedness and force numbers for UNMIS with the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Participants agreed that UNMIS would not have had to demonstrate a huge show of force in order to deter looting and such actions should be covered under UNMIS' Chapter 7 mandate that includes a responsibility to protect civilians.

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DARFUR: A CHANGING SITUATION WITH CHRONIC PROBLEMS  
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16. (SBU) NGOs reported that humanitarian access and space in Darfur are shrinking, bureaucratic impediments are increasing, NGO staff feel increased pressure related to the ICC decision, and programs are frequently impacted by changes in the political situation, whether at national or international levels. NGOs described feeling like "political volleyballs" used by the GoS as a bargaining tool. NGO staff cited concerns about WFP ration cuts that foster increased protection problems for women who would usually sell part of a food ration for cash, but now must travel outside the camps to collect firewood or find work. (NOTE: Beginning in August, the UN World Food Program has restored the ration size to 75 percent of a full ration. END NOTE.) In addition, steering committee members highlighted how bureaucratic impediments limit the fuel and supplies that NGOs can transport to camps, leaving beneficiaries without clean water and other essential services, and thereby increasing the chance for disease outbreaks in the overcrowded camps as IDPs resort to drinking water from non-functioning water pumps or the wadis (seasonal riverbeds). Steering committee members also recalled incidents of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) threatening relief agency staff and accusing humanitarian workers of providing information to the ICC for the ICC's Darfur investigation. According to the NGOs, the accusations were accompanied by threats of future restrictions on access for humanitarian workers and essential relief programs.

17. (SBU) NGOs catalogued current threats of insecurity and the impact that frequent attacks continue to have on implementing partners and beneficiaries. Throughout Darfur, displacement and de-facto camp expansion continue, pockets of increased malnutrition appear, and insecurity and bureaucratic impediments cause a breakdown in supply lines of essential, life-saving supplies. In addition, increased attacks by bandits against humanitarian workers have forced several partners to remove staff and suspend essential programs. According to one NGO partner, "we are forced to choose between putting our staff at risk, and letting children die."

¶8. (SBU) The SE delegation asked the NGOs about the impact of the recent UN shift to Phase IV throughout Darfur. According to the Steering Committee, relief agencies saw the shift as being arbitrarily imposed by the UN rather than stemming from an actual increase in area insecurity. The shift to Phase IV forced humanitarian agencies to reduce staff. This reduction in staff, according to NGOs, is due to air assets for evacuations rather than to security threats. One NGO described the UN-led process of determining essential staffing levels as chaotic and confused especially in determining air assets (particularly UN assets) to transport staff, in both day-to-day and emergency cases.

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COMMENT  
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¶9. (U) Throughout the conversation, NGO participants expressed concern about the future. The SE observed that unfortunately sometimes it seems that "everything in Sudan is a no-win game." The NGOs also expressed anxiety over the ramifications of an ICC indictment to their operations. The SE thanked the Steering Committee for their dedication to Sudan and their difficult work. He underscored the USG's commitment to Sudan and in providing humanitarian relief for those in need. Speaking of the latter, the SE concluded: "It is important to feed them, but it is also important to give them a future for tomorrow--to give them their lives back".

¶10. (U) SE Williamson did not clear this cable prior to his departure.

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ASQUINO